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SUBJECT: Goma Situation Report for December 11, 2007

SENSTIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

Note: The following report was provided by Embassy Kinshasa's political officer in Goma. End note.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: FARDC's military campaign west and north of Sake collapsed December 10 and the military plan, which MONUC North Kivu Brigade Commander General Narayan describes as a very good plan, now "goes back to square one." Nkunda's zone of control returns to what it was in August 2007, minus the village of Kimoka and strategic "Celtel ridge" above Sake, which remain under FARDC control (Note: latest news is that Nkunda is also pressing Celteil ridge). Nkunda has retaken Mushaki and even the towns of Karuba and Bihambwe which had fallen to FARDC in October. FARDC appears to have run out ammunition and will have to restock. Some fighting has occurred in the Rutshuru sector. End Summary.

FARDC's 14th brigade runs away in battle

¶2. (SBU) North Kivu Brigade Commander General Indrajeet Narayan, visibly angered but maintaining professional poise, gave Goma poloff December 11 the following account of events over the preceding day. Nkunda's forces, which had gathered on the ridges around Mushaki, descended on the 14th Integrated Brigade, assigned to consolidate FARDC control over Mushaki, on the afternoon of December 10. The brigade disintegrated, making its retreat to Sake. Nkunda's forces were now present in Mushaki, Karuba (south of Mushaki), and Bihambwe (west of Mushaki), and were rumored to be on their way to Ngungu to the southwest, which they had controlled for most of the year.

¶3. (SBU) Meanwhile, according to Narayan, the FARDC 81st brigade also partially collapsed. That brigade, after the fall of Mushaki to FARDC, had moved west on the Masisi road and had thereafter divided, with one its battalions assigned to hold the key village of Katale (near and on the road to Masisi), and the remainder moving eastward cross-country with a view toward cutting the road between Kirolirwe and Kitchaga and thereby bottling up Nkunda. According to Narayan, the battalion holding Katale remained intact, protecting Masisi, but the portion of the 81st brigade that had moved eastward "fell apart," with its commander, Col. Philemon Yav escaping (by means unknown), brigade-less, to Sake. MONUC-Goma Political Affairs chief Gernot Sauer informed poloff separately that a battalion of the recently-renamed 82nd brigade (formerly the 116th), involved in the assault on Nkunda's forces at Kingi and Kabati (north of Sake), had also "broken and run," with one company commander killed.

Pass the Ammunition

¶4. (SBU) Narayan said that the FARDC would not be able to recommence its military campaign against Nkunda "for at least two months." The plan had been "a very good plan" and it could still

work, but FARDC would need fresh troops. Narayan said that a principal factor in the collapse of the campaign was, simply, that the FARDC had run out of ammunition. In a mere few days, it had run through all its stocks of ammunition, including for its helicopters.

Narayan said that the campaign should not have started with too little ammunition, or its use should have been better planned. MONUC had provided transport, but ammunition supply planning was the province of FARDC. Narayan said that FARDC 8th Military Region commander General Vainqueur Mayala had cited to him as the reason for the collapse that the soldiers had not been paid, but Narayan saw that claim as "an excuse." Meanwhile, FARDC Chief of Staff Dieudonne Kayembe was expected in Goma in the course of the day.

¶15. (SBU) Poloff related that he had heard from journalists that there had also been fighting on the Rutshuru axis, with the fall to Nkunda's forces of the village of Katuba to the east of Rumangabo, near the Ugandan border. Narayan said that there had only been an "exchange of stand-off fire" (shooting at a distance) five miles east of Rumangabo, but this exchange "appeared to be nothing very serious." Meanwhile, there was no activity on the Tongo axis (east-west corridor north of the volcanoes, connecting Nkunda's heartland to his pocket bordering Uganda and Rwanda). "The Tongo thrust" by the FARDC was "now a faint dream."

Back to Square One

¶16. (SBU) Sauer, in a separate conversation, said that the military situation west and north of Sake had now "gone back to square one," with Nkunda occupying the same terrain he had held last August, minus the village of Kimoka (just north of Sake) and the strategic Celtel ridge (northwest and directly above Sake), which FARDC continued to control. (Sauer called back a few hours later, in mid-afternoon, to say that there was now fighting on Celtel ridge.)

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The FARDC had retaken Karuba and Bihambwe in mid-October and now lost them again. However, Sauer said, Nkunda faced somewhat the same problems of "consolidation" and "control" as did the FARDC, so it was not accurate to characterize Nkunda's present hold on this area as "control." Sauer said that, whatever now transpired in the area, MONUC was determined to defend Sake "by all available means." It would not countenance eleventh-hour scrambling to save Sake as it had done a year ago, using its combat helicopters. Sake was deemed essential to the defense of Goma. MONUC was equally determined to defend the town of Rutshuru, though not the entire Goma/Rutshuru axis. Sauer said that there were reports of human rights violations by FARDC in this military campaign, including killing of Tutsis and a massacre at a church near Mushaki, but MONUC had not verified such reports.

¶17. (SBU) Comment: At December 12 meeting with Ambassador Garvelink and A/F special advisor Shortley, MONUC Force Commander General Boubakar Gaye (pls protect) said that the ammunition excuse for the Mushaki retreat was a flimsy pretext. Gaye noted that if the Congolese military had proper management procedures in place, MONUC could have easily provided it with needed ammunition. He expressed great concern over FARDC's inability to meet soldiers' basic needs, its deficient leadership, and command and control issues, emphasizing in particular that coordination and communication among senior officers were inadequate. End comment.

Garvelink